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Galena Park's program for early detection and individual programing for children with suspected school adjustment difficulties has identified major problem areas into which such children usually fall. Approximately ten percent of the children examined are those whose motor coordination is delayed or faulty. Such children are the most likely to be unable to respond favorably in the learning situation. About five percent of the children are unable to take directions. Approximately five percent are unable to understand and to express themselves in written and spoken word. (Medical history is often significant in these cases.) Approximately two percent are restless and hyperactive. The overly anxious child often displays a history of various types of trauma which cause difficulties in adjusting to the learning situation. Psychological disorders are highly correlated with the major physiologically and socially determined causations. When appropriate teaching methods are applied, and when an effort is made to understand the causative factors involved, about 65% of these children can be moved from special classes into regular classes.

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CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS

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CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS

By: F. E. McGahan

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the findings of the Galena Park Early Detection and Individual Programming for Children with Suspected School Adjustment Difficulties. While these findings represent nine years of study and exploration and are as yet tentative, they nevertheless indicate general sharp focused conclusions. To wit:

1. Of the children who can be expected to learn and for a multiplicity of reasons do not learn or find it extremely difficult to respond favorably to the learning demands, 25% or above experience from mild to severe stress in adjusting to the learning situation.

2. While the major causes of the learning difficulty overlap and are interrelated, they are nevertheless separate and identifiable.

3. While a great many early symptoms of poor school adjustment are obvious, in the main, the majority are more subtle and to a degree can be characterized as imperceptible.

4. Methods of both handling and teaching require more deliberate and specific techniques. In other words, the pupil's program has to be tailored.

5. A staff, working with a coordinator who has a background in educational psychology, can be trained to make valid judgments as to a child's tolerance for school adjustment stresses.

By and large, there are six major developmental lags or gaps in the learning response, five of which are related to the physiological growth and one to the psychological aspect. In order of incidence and importance they are described below:

Children who reflect the lack of both gross and fine motor coordination; children who seem to be poorly or faultily oriented in basic life experiences; children who reflect marked language

disorder symptoms; children who reflect more than the usual amount of anxiety or fear, and children whose psychological assessment profile reflect extreme disparity in the high and low vectors of the test instrument as represented by such instruments as the WISC Scale for Children.

To elaborate further, children whose motor coordination is delayed or faulty are the most likely to be unable to respond favorably in the learning situation. Often the identifiable symptom is seen in a slight awkwardness in gait or slight imbalance tendency. Generally, there is a noticeable difficulty in posturing. Also, there is a very high incidence of these children who experience severe difficulty in body awareness such as an awareness of the right and left sides of their body, the up and down concept and the left to right orientation in the writing and reading skills. In addition, the ability to recognize and reproduce common geometric forms, to angulate and to coordinate eye-hand movements are noticeably lacking. It is to be observed that success in learning is primarily predicated upon the motor coordination facility. Approximately ten percent of children can be expected to be involved or delayed in motor maturation.

Children who seem to be poorly or faultily related in life experiences represent five percent or more of the pupil population who are in difficulty. These children seem to be unable to understand what is expected of them. They experience severe difficulty in the ability to take directions. They often reflect extreme confusion and tension in adjusting to group demands, such as marching in line, playing in the group or taking group instructions. Their language facility is often low. Their attention span is short. A major caution here is to make a judgment as to whether

or not the etiology is something other than the cultural aspect, however.

Children with language disorders or the ability to understand and express themselves in written and spoken word are children whose medical histories become a major concern. In this area of difficulty there is a very high incidence in histories of high fever, difficult birth, breach birth, children whose life began with an experience of the lack of oxygen or anoxia, the rh factor, and histories of concussions or head insults. Approximately five percent of children fall into the language disorder category.

Children who are restless, hyperactive and motor driven make up a sizable portion of the pupil population, approximately two percent. These children often are just reflecting a much deeper based etiology resulting from difficulties such as those described above. With these children the differential diagnosis is of primary importance. For example, children with a central brain lesion reflect the same or similar behavioral symptoms. Learning comes very difficult for these children.

The overly anxious child is a reality in the learning situation. Also, with this child there seems to be an anxiety proneness. The underlying cause of this difficulty is difficult to demonstrate. Again, there are often many facets to its basic etiology. The physiological aspect, such as a neurological or a glandular dysfunction can be associated with this type of behavior. But often the difficulty stems from a history of multiple trauma experienced by the child, such as a divorce, a separation experience with a loved object, high mobility rate on the part of the family, resulting in the child's becoming overly anxious. In any case, multiple trauma frequently makes for poor school adjustment.

In other words, susceptibility to anxiety seems to be triggered along the way.

The psychological aspect, while not a causation, nevertheless is highly correlated with the major physiologically and socially determined causations. For example, when the intellectual functioning of the child is evaluated by such scales as the WISC there is an extremely high correlation in low performance in Coding (transferral of symbols), Block Design (reproduction of visual impressions), and Picture Arrangement (logical reasoning.) The child who is blocked by an apparent lack of related life experiences will likely perform at a low level in Vocabulary, Information (sustained memory), and possibly Similarities (abstract reasoning.) Children whose behavior reflect hyperactivity, restlessness and perseveration perform at a low level in Digit Span (immediate recall), Comprehension, Information and Picture Arrangement. Children with language disorders perform at low level in Vocabulary, Information, Similarities, and tasks having to do with form perception, Object Assembly and Block Design.

The overly anxious child will likely perform low in such tasks as Digit Span and Comprehension. Broadly speaking, children with physiological involvements perform higher in verbal tasks and lower in performance ones; while children whose difficulties stem from social and emotional causations, perform higher in the performance tasks and lower in the verbal ones.

In light of the above findings it can be observed that the number of children reflecting learning blocks is much greater than was thought and that the basic causations can be identified and demonstrated at a very early age utilizing a staff proficiency.

In implementing these findings, and in an attempt to provide a realistic corrective or habilitative learning situation for these children, it has become necessary for the Galena Park program to make radical changes in both methodology and child handling. Small transition regular classes extending through the first three grades provide a more deliberate and concrete exposure to the learning tasks. Children move through the achievement developmental skills rather than the mere assimilation of factual knowledge.

Children whose difficulties prove to be more stubborn and resistive to correction are eventually recommended for deeper placement, either for the perceptually handicapped child or to the emotionally disturbed. Those that are intellectually less capable are placed in the appropriate classes provided for the exceptional child.

The child with the visual-motor deficit receives deliberate skill training in tasks that are designed to increase his eye-hand coordination particularly in form perception tasks. For the child whose related experiences are weak, the readiness program is vastly enriched as well as being more tailored to the individual child's need.

For those children whose behavior is as yet unstabilized, a deliberate effort is made to help these children control their reactions to distracting stimuli even to the point of the use of isolation cubicles.

With the language disorder involvements, the primary concern is the securing of an adequate differential diagnosis, with particular emphasis on the medical aspect. In like manner, the handling of children whose anxiety proneness can be demonstrated,

appropriate learning situations are provided. The teacher factor is given primary concern with the difficulty where the overly anxious child is concerned.

Finally, when the appropriate methods of teaching are utilized and a definite effort is made to understand the causative factors underlying the child's deviating behavior, about 65% of these children within a period from two to three years can be strengthened in their learning skills sufficient to move into the regular class medium. The remainder will need only partial shelter in the two major abstract subject matter areas, language arts including the reading skills, and mathematics.

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